

Zonta Says NOW to Gender-Equal Climate Action

1. Introduction

The climate crisis is a human rights crisis – and a women’s rights crisisⁱ.

UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, at CSW66, 2022.

How are the climate crisis and gender equality linked? As greenhouse gas emissions increase, they warm the atmosphere and trigger extreme weather events such as heatwaves, droughts, bushfires, ice loss, sea level rises, floods and stormsⁱⁱ. These events cause social disruption and magnify existing inequalities—people lose their homes and jobs, the poor get poorer, there is more stress and violence—and **gender inequality accelerates**. We can break this chain of events by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and closing the gender gaps in education, economic opportunity and decision making.

Zonta Says NOW to gender equal-climate action encourages Zontians to:

- Learn about the climate crisis to understand how increased greenhouse gas emissions ultimately lead to increased gender inequality.
- Advocate for the rights of women and girls in a future where gender equality is threatened by extreme weather events, sea level rise, changes in agricultural patterns and global insecurity.
- Take on leadership positions in our communities, workplaces and parliaments so that women are equally represented around decision-making tables.

We are living in a decisive decade for humanity. United Nations scientists have shown that we must limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels to preserve a liveable planet—and we have already reached 1.1°C. The UN recommends reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050.ⁱⁱⁱ

As Zonta Says NOW champions, we will actively reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and stand up for the rights of women and girls in this decisive decade for humanity.

2. The problems

- Human activity has altered almost 75% of the earth’s surface^{iv}, and around 1 million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction.^v
- Global climate change impacts, such as intense heat, drought, bushfires, floods and storms, displaced 30 million people in 2020^{vi} and, without increased action on climate change, could displace around a billion people by 2050.^{vii}
- Climate change acts as a threat multiplier catalysing water and food scarcity, pandemics and displacement.^{viii}
- Women are more likely than men to live in extreme poverty.^{ix}
- Nearly 60% of people who are severely hungry are women and girls. Severe hunger can lead to iron deficiency and organ damage if left untreated.^x
- Women and girls are more likely to be injured and killed in extreme weather events.^{xi}
- In some places, girls may not be allowed to swim or climb trees, making it difficult for them to escape from floodwaters. The restrictive nature of some traditional clothing worn by women and girls can make it more difficult for them to move quickly from dangerous situations. Also, women and girls may not be permitted to

leave their houses without a male family member, impeding their ability to escape or seek help in a disaster.^{xii}

- About 218 million women in lower and middle-income countries have an unmet need for modern contraception, and it is estimated that nearly half of their pregnancies (111 million annually) are unintended.^{xiii}
- Like all war, conflict and crisis-related existential emergencies and threats, the catastrophic effects of climate change have been shown to lead to an increase in forced and child marriages,^{xiv} an increase in forced prostitution^{xv} and other forms of sexualized violence - not least in connection with modern slavery.^{xvi}
- Globally, the average gender pay gap is around 20%,^{xvii} and in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), women aged 65 and older receive 26% less income than men from the pension system.^{xviii}
- During the COVID pandemic, women suffered disproportionate job and income losses,^{xix} and violence against women increased.^{xx}
- Women are more likely than men to be illiterate^{xxi} and are less likely to use the internet.^{xxii} Women are less likely than men to access digital warning systems and emergency assistance, access digital devices, access digital education and training and access digital networks and electricity. This digital gender divide means that women can miss out on educational opportunities, information on essential services and access to healthcare.^{xxiii}
- Climate change is likely to exacerbate sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls.^{xxiv}
- Globally, one-quarter of parliamentarians are women,^{xxv} and fewer than 30% of climate negotiators are women,^{xxvi} making it difficult to hear women's voices on the world stage.
- Women are largely excluded from shaping disaster risk reduction policies and plans.^{xxvii}

3. The solutions

- Girls with 12 years of education have more life choices, can build more resilient communities, and have fewer children than girls with no education.^{xxviii} Increased knowledge about, access to and quality of voluntary family planning, and 12 years of high-quality education, are essential to achieving the UN's 2019 medium global population projection of 9.7 billion people by 2050.^{xxix}
- Globally, women have around three-quarters of the legal rights of men.^{xxx} Increasing their legal rights will enable women to legally access credit, sign a contract, register a business and open a bank account – making it easier to obtain and improve land or start businesses to support their families.
- Ending violence against women will enable more women to participate at their full potential.^{xxxi}
- Science, technology and innovation are central to reaching the targets of the Paris Agreement, yet globally, women made up less than a third of the world's science researchers.^{xxxii} Advocating for more women and girls to study science, technology, engineering and mathematic subjects (STEM) will ensure more diverse thought and gendered climate solutions.
- Countries with more women in their parliaments adopt more stringent climate policies.^{xxxiii}
- Inspiring more women into leadership positions in their communities, workplaces, councils, and parliaments and wherever they can be involved in planning and policymaking is crucial to tackling climate change effectively.^{xxxiv}

4. What can we do?

1. Get the facts

- We can increase our awareness of climate change and its gender-related consequences by:
 - Reading books, watching videos, reading articles and listening to podcasts from reputable sources, e.g., United Nations agencies,^{xxxv} TED Countdown,^{xxxvi} NASA,^{xxxvii} David Attenborough documentaries,^{xxxviii} Jane Goodall Hopecasts,^{xxxix} Outrage and Optimism podcasts.^{xl}
 - Learning more about the Sustainable Development Goals^{xli} and what is happening in our state, region and community.

2. Lead by example

- Reduce our emissions with ten simple actions^{xliii} and set our own sustainability challenges e.g., eating and purchasing more sustainably, walking and using public transport more often and supporting environmentally sustainable businesses with our purchases and investments.

3. Add our voice

- Raise awareness locally about climate change and its gender-related consequences by
 - Developing climate/gender equality elevator speeches or lists of key facts as conversation starters with family, co-workers and friends.^{xliii} Practice saying them.
 - Joining and hosting local events/marches to raise awareness.
 - Talking with local organizations and elected officials to raise awareness and discuss solutions.

4. Advocate

- Contact community representatives, local politicians, local governments, and local NGOs to learn about local sustainability initiatives and whether the needs of women have been considered (or not) in the development of climate change response and disaster management plans.
- Demand and support the equal involvement of women and men in national and local decisions regarding environmental sustainability and disaster risk management.
- Demand and promote girls' education and the inclusion of climate literacy in schools, as well as the education of girls and women in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to increase the scientific and technical contribution of women to climate protection.
- Advocate for national climate policies that take into account women's economic opportunities and ensure their full and equal economic participation.

5. Collaborate

- Work with Zonta clubs to magnify our voice, educate on climate change, and raise awareness of local issues to achieve gender-equal climate justice.
- Work smarter, not harder, by collaborating with like-minded organisations, for example, UN Women,^{xliv} 1 Million Women,^{xlv} and Plastic Free July.^{xlvi} Find out who is working for gender-equal climate justice in your area.

Many Zontians around the world have already started to take action. Check out the websites at District 23 Zonta Says NOW, the USA Caucus, District 12 and District 8 for ideas.

Through our gender-equal climate action, we can build a better world for everyone.

References

- ⁱ UN Women, 2022, *The climate crisis is a human rights crisis and a women's rights crisis, UN chief says*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/news/2022/03/the-climate-crisis-is-a-human-rights-crisis-and-a-womens-rights-crisis-un-chief-says>
- ⁱⁱ International Panel on Climate Change, 2021, *Climate change widespread, rapid, and intensifying*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Climate Action, *For a livable climate: Net-zero commitments must be backed by credible action*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition>
- ^{iv} United Nations UN News, *First Person: COVID-19 is not a silver lining for the climate, says UN Environment Chief*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061082>
- ^v Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), 2019, *The global assessment report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf page 12
- ^{vi} Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/index.html>
- ^{vii} Institute for Economics and Peace, *Ecological Threat Report 2021*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ETR-2021-web-131021.pdf>
- ^{viii} European Parliamentary Research Service, 2022, *Climate change considerations for EU security and defence policy*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/729467/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)729467_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/729467/EPRS_BRI(2022)729467_EN.pdf)
- ^{ix} Statista, 2022, *Gender poverty gaps worldwide in 2020 and 2021 (with a forecast to 2030), by gender*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1219896/gender-poverty-gaps-worldwide-by-gender/>
- ^x United Nations World Food Programme, 2023, *#womenarehungrier*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.wfpusa.org/drivers-of-hunger/gender-inequality/>
- ^{xi} Carbon Brief, 2020, *Mapped: How climate change disproportionately affects women's health*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.carbonbrief.org/mapped-how-climate-change-disproportionately-affects-womens-health/>
- ^{xii} United Nations Environment Programme, 2011, *Women at the frontline of climate change: gender risks and hopes*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7985>
- ^{xiii} Guttmacher Institute, 2020, *Adding it up: investing in sexual and reproductive health 2019*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/adding-it-up-investing-in-sexual-reproductive-health-2019>
- ^{xiv} Oxfam, 2020, *Facing impossible choices: women bear the brunt of hunger*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/facing-impossible-choices-women-bear-brunt-hunger>
- ^{xv} Development Aid, 2021, *Child prostitution surges in hunger-hit Zimbabwe*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/87700/child-prostitution-in-zimbabwe>
- ^{xvi} Anti-slavery and International Institute for Environment Development, 2021, *Climate-induced migration and modern slavery: a toolkit for policy-makers*, retrieved on 15/2/23 from <https://respect.international/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Climate-induced-migration-and-modern-slavery.pdf>
- ^{xvii} United Nations, 2022, *Equal pay for work of equal value*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.un.org/en/observances/equal-pay-day>
- ^{xviii} Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021, *Towards improved retirement savings outcome for women*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/f7b48808-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/f7b48808-en>
- ^{xix} International Labour Organization, 2021, *Fewer women than men will regain employment during the COVID-19 recovery says ILO*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_813449/lang-en/index.htm
- ^{xx} UN Women, 2021, *Measuring the shadow pandemic: violence against women during COVID-19*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/vaw-rga>
- ^{xxi} Statista, 2022, *Global adult literacy rate from 2009 to 2020, by gender*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1220131/global-adult-literacy-rate-by-gender/>
- ^{xxii} International Telecommunication Union, 2023, *Measuring digital development: facts and figures 2022*, retrieved on 15/2/23 from https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-ind-ict_mdd-2022/
- ^{xxiii} World Wide Web Foundation, 2021, *The costs of exclusion: economic consequences of the Digital Gender Gap*, retrieved on 15/2/23 from <https://webfoundation.org/research/costs-of-exclusion-report/>

-
- xxiv Desai, BH and Mandal M, 2021, *Environmental Policy and Law*, 51, 137-157, *Role of climate change in exacerbating sexual and gender-based violence against women: a new challenge for international law*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/report/role-of-climate-change-in-exacerbating-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-against-women-a-new-challenge-for-international-law/epl_2021_51-3_epl-51-3-epl210055_epl-51-epl210055.pdf
- xxv The World Bank, 2021, *Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
- xxvi Women's Environment and Development Organization, 2022, *Women's participation in the UNFCCC: 2022 Report*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://wedo.org/womens-participation-in-the-unfccc-2022-report/>
- xxvii UN Women, *Disaster Risk Reduction*, retrieved on 01/03/23 from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/disaster-risk-reduction>
- xxviii [Project Drawdown, 2022, Family planning and education](https://drawdown.org/solutions/family-planning-and-education), retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://drawdown.org/solutions/family-planning-and-education>
- xxix United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects 2022 Summary of Results*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/wpp2022_summary_of_results.pdf
- xxx The World Bank, 2022, *Nearly 2.4 billion women globally don't have same economic rights as men*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/01/nearly-2-4-billion-women-globally-don-t-have-same-economic-rights-as-men>
- xxxi UN Women, undated, *Ending violence against women*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>
- xxxii United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2019, *Women in science*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs55-women-in-science-2019-en.pdf>
- xxxiii Mavisakalyan, A and Tarverdi, Y, 2019, *European Journal of Political Economy*, 56, 151-164, *Gender and climate change: do female parliamentarians make a difference?* retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0176268017304500>
- xxxiv World Economic Forum, 2021, *Why female leadership is crucial to tackle climate change and other crises*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/11/why-female-leadership-is-crucial-to-tackle-climate-change/>
- xxxv United Nations Climate Action, the home page, 2023, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange>
- xxxvi TED Countdown, 2023, *TED Countdown Summit*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://countdown.ted.com/>
- xxxvii NASA, 2023, *How do we know climate change is real?*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/#:~:text=Scientific%20information%20taken%20from%20natural.of%20a%20warming%20planet%20abounds.>
- xxxviii Global Citizen, 2021, *9 Staggering facts from David Attenborough's new devastating documentary on climate change*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/shocking-facts-david-attenborough-netflix-film/>
- xxxix Apple Podcasts, *The Jane Goodall Hopecast*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/the-jane-goodall-hopecast/id1520263700>
- xl *Outrage and Optimism, Outrage and Optimism podcast*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.outrageandoptimism.org/>
- xli United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The 17 goals*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- xlii United Nations Act Now, 2021, *Start with these ten actions*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.un.org/en/actnow/ten-actions#:~:text=Eating%20more%20vegetables%2C%20fruits%2C%20whole.energy%2C%20land%2C%20and%20water.>
- xliii United Nations Climate Action, undated, *Communicating on climate change*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/communicating-climate-change>
- xliv UN Women, undated, *We are the global champion for gender equality*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.unwomen.org/en>
- xlv One Million Women, undated, *We are women from every corner of the planet living climate action through everything we do*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.1millionwomen.com.au/>
- xlvi Plastic Free July, undated, *Join millions of people reducing their plastic waste*, retrieved on 12/2/23 from <https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/>